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SUBJECT: ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR SAYS GOA MIGHT BE READY TO  
TALK TO MOROCCANS

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for Reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Algerian Ambassador Belkheir told Ambassador Riley April 17 that although Algeria was not prepared to listen to the Moroccans about their autonomy proposal, Algiers might accept a delegation from Rabat "after the end of the Security council debate," if it was not to talk about the Sahara. He repeated familiar Algerian positions that Algiers is not a party to the dispute and was determined to support the principle of self-determination. Amb./Gen. Belkheir, a longtime member of the Algerian military elite said security cooperation on counterterrorism between the Maghreb neighbors was good and ongoing. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Algerian Ambassador to Morocco General Larbi Belkheir accompanied by his number two, Ambassador-ranked Boumedienne Guennad, hosted Ambassador Riley and Polcouns April 17. Belkheir, a senior player on the Algerian side for decades, spoke of the long history of friction between the two Maghreb neighbors. Belkheir, a regular visitor to Washington during his days as Presidential Chief of staff and virtual National Security Adviser spoke of his close contacts with senior officials and with a succession of US ambassadors. After Baker's resignation, Algeria had wanted the USG to nominate a senior figure to replace him as Personal Envoy, and was disappointed that this did not happen. Belkheir praised the series of recent contacts between his staff and Embassy Rabat and believed the two embassies should work more closely together.

Shared Fight Against Terror  
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¶3. (C) Ambassador Riley offered condolences for the losses in the recent terrorist attacks in Algiers. Belkheir offered his for Blacksburg. The Algerian ambassador said that the bombings in Algiers had not been suicide bombers, unlike those in Morocco. Nonetheless Algiers believed that all had some kind of link to the GSPC Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). He maintained there is already good cooperation between Morocco and Algeria on security/counterterrorism, which has been getting stronger.

Sahara  
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¶4. (C) Ambassador outlined U.S. positions on the serious and

credible nature of the Moroccan initiative and in support of unconditional negotiations, noting these had been conveyed in Algiers. He urged that the GOA encourage the POLISARIO to enter talks without preconditions. Belkheir repeated standard Algerian rhetoric on its principled approach to self-determination, insisting that Algeria was not a party. (Ambassador Riley pushed back on this, noting that Algeria had been closely involved in previous U.N.-led efforts to find a solution.) Belkheir also stated, somewhat inconsistently, that if the Polisario and HOM were to come to an agreement, Algeria "would be the first to applaud it". When pressed, he admitted that support would apply even if the self-determination did not include an option of independence.

15. (C) Belkheir cited the POLISARIO proposal as a mark of responsiveness drawing attention to new elements, such as its undertaking to establish close relations post independence with Morocco and to allow citizenship for Moroccans present in the territory for 10 years. He did say however that Algeria might be able to support negotiations if they were not based on Moroccan sovereignty. He confirmed that the GOM had offered to go to Algiers to brief on their plan but that his government could not accept this, repeating that Algeria was not a party to the dispute.

Bilateral relations: Maybe an opening?  
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16. (C) However, Belkheir said clearly that if Morocco offered to send a delegation to Algiers it is possible his government would accept it, if it was to discuss bilateral relations and not the Sahara. He stressed that this would only work if it were proposed after the end of the Security

Council debate and MINURSO rollover, so that it didn't look like they were discussing the Sahara. Belkheir repeatedly insisted Algeria and Morocco were brothers, but, digging deep into the historical record as he saw it, made no secret of the intense and deep-seated differences between them. He railed against the Moroccan press which he said regularly insults President Bouteflika (and himself). Still, he said, there was a chance for improvement. King Mohammed VI's statement of condolences for the Algiers bombings had been very well received. If the Sahara problem were solved, it would immediately lead to a normalization of relations, opening of the border, and progress in Maghreb integration, he opined. He stressed that Algeria was long committed to the stability of Morocco and to the continuation of the monarchy here.

COMMENT:  
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17. (C) Belkheir's suggestions of a Moroccan delegation to Algiers might be a good one, even if initially focused just on bilateral relations. We are skeptical of their interest in a resolution of the issue, and certainly of their denial of having a decisive role. Also, given the long rivalry between these neighbors, we doubt that even a solution to the Sahara would immediately lead to full-scale rapprochement. Rather the other way around, warmer bilateral relations would improve the prospects of a settlement on Sahara . As we pursue a Sahara resolution, we should continue, even intensify a parallel effort to get these two to engage on both fighting their common Jihadist enemy and on the other issues that they have in common as well as those which divide them.

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RILEY